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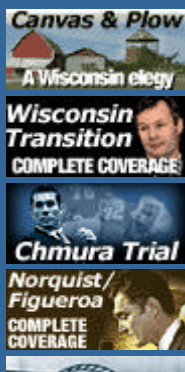


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 THIS STORY

River's large ice slabs worry residents

Chunks converge near base of bridge at Humboldt Ave.

By NAHAL TOOSI
 of the Journal Sentinel staff

Last Updated: Feb. 21, 2001

Around the base of the Humboldt Ave. bridge, giant slabs of ice lie jam-packed, covering the Milwaukee River for hundreds of feet and causing concern among the waterway's neighbors.

The chunks, which are at least a foot thick, are stacked as high as 5 feet above the river level in some places, and cover the span of the river. Changing water levels from Lake Michigan cause the jumble to rise and fall.

"It's wrecked our dock," said Earl Lazenby, 75, who has lived for 46 years at 2134 Riverboat Road, the street that parallels the river upstream from the Humboldt bridge. "We were going to repair it last year. Good thing we didn't do it."

Lazenby and his wife, Dolores, 77, worry that the ice could weaken the bridge. They also wonder what will happen if spring showers lead to torrential water movement from upriver toward the jammed ice.



Photo/Bill Lizdas

A German shepherd named Nero, owned by Tim Burns, walks along the thick ice slabs on the Milwaukee River at the base of the Humboldt Ave. bridge on Wednesday afternoon. Earl and Dolores Lazenby, who live nearby, say the ice has ruined their dock.

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City officials said the bridge should be safe, although flooding is not out of the question. The officials also said there's little hope of finding a tugboat strong enough to break through the pile.

"It's an odd phenomenon," said Bob Fenske, a city bridge operator supervisor who recently visited the scene. "I've never seen that before."

The Lazenbys said ice chunks used to be more dispersed through the upper and lower rivers.

That was before the state Department of Natural Resources opened the North Ave. dam in 1990, narrowing the width of the upper river. The dam was removed in 1997.

Now the water simply flows through a small opening where the dam used to be and almost immediately hits an ice-topped waterway that quickly breaks up into chunks just a few hundred feet down, clogging up around the base of the Humboldt Ave. bridge.

Mild winters in the last three years have meant no other recent pile-ups, the Lazenbys said. "This year should serve as a lesson," Dolores Lazenby said.

Whether the DNR is responsible for breaking apart the ice remains a mystery.

Nearby residents and workers said their phone calls to the DNR have yielded no responses.

And on Wednesday, DNR spokeswoman Kathleen Wolski said she wasn't sure whether her department would handle such a matter, but that the appropriate representatives who would know were out of the office.

"Nobody's doing anything," said Jay Dallmann, manager of the National Building Maintenance Inc. facility at nearby 2072 N. Commerce St. "You've got to worry about the shoreline eroding. I've been here for five years, and I've never seen it like this."

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